

'Cosmic opera' set for Paris tower

October 8 2009



This aerial picture taken in Paris in July shows the Eiffel Tower (centre), the Montparnasse Tower (left) and the business district of La Defense (background). The rooftop of the Montparnasse Tower is to be transformed into a cosmic-ray laboratory in an unusual week-long experiment due to start on Saturday.

The rooftop of a Paris skyscraper is to be transformed into a cosmic-ray laboratory in an unusual week-long experiment due to start on Saturday.

Every time a detector on top of the the 210-metre (689-feet) Montparnasse Tower picks up a sub-atomic particle called a [muon](#), a pulse of laser light will flash across the sky of the city's Latin Quarter from the Paris Observatory.

Muons are debris from protons that are blasted out from the Sun or beyond our Solar System and constantly bombard the Earth.

The protons smash apart when they collide with molecules in the [upper atmosphere](#). Their short-lived remains shoot down to the planet's surface at nearly the speed of light.

The so-called "cosmic opera" seeks to inform the public about cosmic particles and pay tribute to an experiment into the phenomenon, conducted at the top of the [Eiffel Tower](#) in 1910 by a German physicist, Theodor Wulf.

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